



## Message from the Vice President



Tim Dunne  
Vice President

For this fall 2015 NJCTGA newsletter I am “pinch-hitting” for our association President Chris Nicholson. Chris is facing some serious health issues related to his kidneys and has decided to concentrate on his family and his health for now and leave the NJCTGA work to others. Luckily we have a great team: a committed Board of Directors, a hard working newsletter editor and a tremendous Executive Secretary/Treasurer. These dedicated individuals will help keep our ship heading on course until our captain returns. Get well soon, Chris.

The past growing season was one of extremes. An extremely dry March, April and May during our planting season was cause for concern. Abundant rainfall in June and July helped new transplants perk up, but some growers reported significant losses of new plantings. Extreme hot and dry conditions returned in August and September with the NJ DEP declaring a “drought watch” for much of our state. A drought watch is prompted by continued dry weather, above-average temperatures and overall rainfall deficits that have decreased reservoir, groundwater and streamflow levels. As I write this message the 5 day forecast calls for rain, rain and more rain. Hopefully our drought watch does not turn into a flood watch!

As we head into our busy Christmas tree sales season, we always need to keep in mind the safety of our customers. The choose and cut tree farm is a wonderful experience for families during a wonderful time of year but can also be dangerous. Farms can have holes, stumps, rocks and more potential pitfalls. Most growers I have visited have good signage to keep

*continued on page 2*

## Assessment Checklist for Choose & Cut Operations

A Rutgers, New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station website is well worth a look before the start of the 2015 Choose & Cut season. The website [agritourism.rutgers.edu/training/](http://agritourism.rutgers.edu/training/) focuses on agritourism development. One segment on the website for operations inviting customers onto the farm is assessment checklists. The checklists can be downloaded by clicking on “Supplemental Materials” found on the upper left hand of the website.

Under Supplemental Materials the following documents were developed/collected to provide additional resources for farmers when receiving training based on the materials and training modules and webinars:

- Emergency Response & Liability Assessment Checklist
- Employee Assessment Checklist
- General Farm Safety Assessment Checklist
- Marketing Assessment Checklist
- Parking & Traffic Assessment Checklist
- Farm Accident/Incident Report Form

Depending on the specifics of your Christmas tree operation the checklists provide for either a “yes” or “no” response. In addition you may prioritize and rank each response as being either a high, medium or low priority.



The NJCTGA's Board of Directors realize the importance of managing risks on Choose & Cut farms and asked Brian Schilling to speak at the 2016 winter meeting on agritourism development as it relates to Christmas tree farms. Brian is Assistant Extension Specialist in Agricultural Policy, Rutgers University and project director for the Extension Training for Agritourism Development program.

In summary, this website will provide you with a checklist for managing risks and acting on those risks that you deem have a high priority.

[agritourism.rutgers.edu/training/](http://agritourism.rutgers.edu/training/)



**Winter Meeting**  
**Saturday, January 30, 2016**  
**at the EcoComplex in**  
**Bordentown Township,**  
**Burlington County**

*Mark your calendar and watch your email for more details!*

# River-Friendly Farms

By: Donna A. Cole

The River-Friendly Farm Program, operated under the North Jersey Resource Conservation and Development, was initiated to address water quality concerns within the Raritan River Basin. Many of the streams within the watershed have been assessed as impaired for phosphorous. Phosphorous runoff can be attributed to poor management within agricultural areas. The program seeks to promote agricultural best management practices through recognition of those farms that, through good management, help to protect water resources within the watershed.

The mission of the River-Friendly Farm Program is to facilitate the transition to sustainable use and protection of the region's human and natural resources through partnerships, education, and innovation.

Conservation planning assistance is offered to those farms that do not meet the certifying criteria, but would like to install or adapt the necessary components to become certified as River-Friendly.

Currently there are five (5) NJCTGA member farms certified as River-Friendly:

Cole's Country Tree Farm – Donna and Drew Cole  
Milford, Hunterdon County

Murray Christmas Tree Farm – Sean Murray  
Lebanon, Hunterdon County

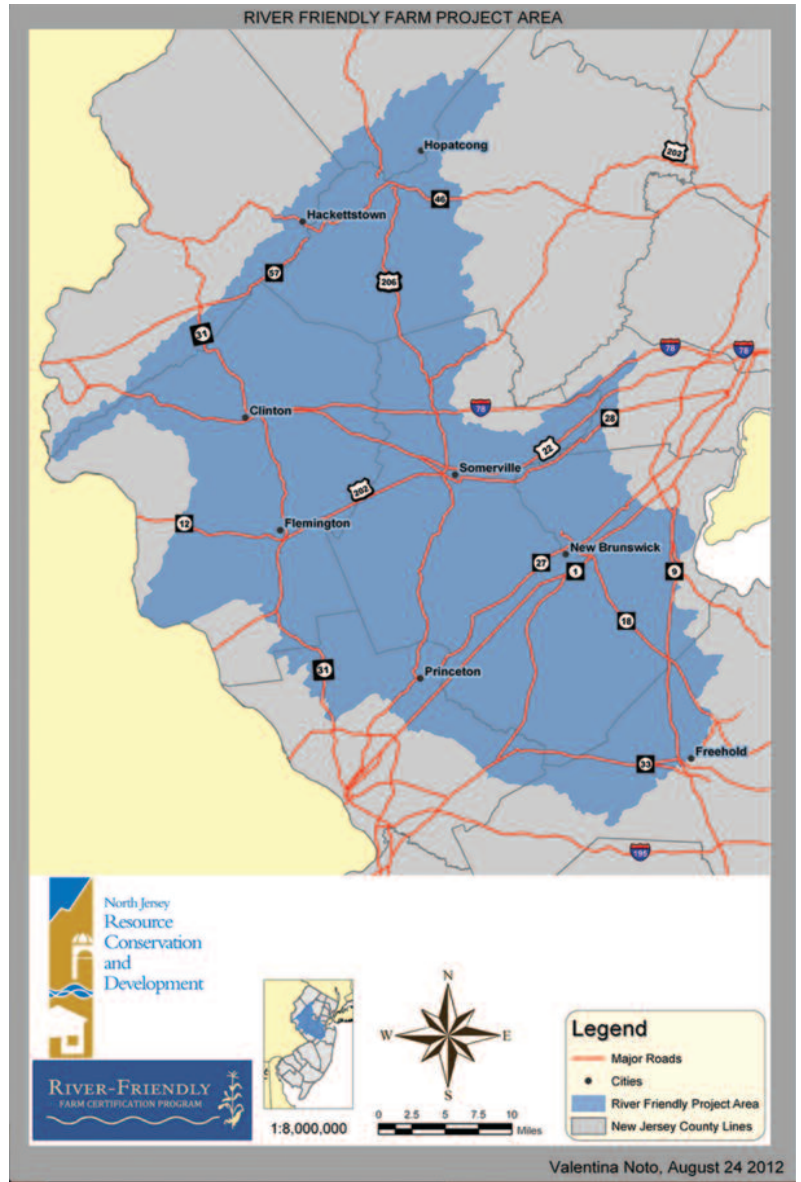
Plut's Christmas Tree Farm – Michael Plut  
Long Valley, Morris County

Wolgast Tree Farm – Leonard Wolgast  
Somerset, Somerset County

Woodsedge Tree Farm – Tim and Mim Dunne  
Belvidere, Warren County

For more information about the River-Friendly Farm certification program please visit [www.njriverfriendlyfarm.org](http://www.njriverfriendlyfarm.org).

*Donna A. Cole, owner of Cole's Country Tree Farm, Milford, Hunterdon County, is the NJCTGA Executive Secretary.*



## Message from the Vice President *continued from page 1*

customers informed of any potential dangers on the farm. Vehicular traffic is another concern during our busiest days. Please post signs directing traffic patterns and try to keep all vehicles moving at 5 miles-per-hour or less. With these issues in mind we have lined up speakers from Rutgers University for our annual winter meeting to

provide information on some of the safety risks of agritourism on farms. They will cover topics such as how to identify hazards and risks on an agritourism operation and properly manage them through employee training, risk communication to customers, and establishing emergency response procedures. These issues may be

overlooked on some farms and while accidents are very rare, being prepared in case of an accident may be the best thing you can do this season. More information on the winter meeting will be forthcoming.

I wish you and your families a healthy, happy and safe Christmas season.



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[njchristmastrees.org](http://njchristmastrees.org)

Contact Donna Cole, Exec. Secretary, at (908) 735-4658 or email [execsecretary@njchristmastrees.org](mailto:execsecretary@njchristmastrees.org)

DESIGNED AT ROWAN COLLEGE AT BURLINGTON COUNTY



# Grower's Spotlight:

## EVERGREEN VALLEY CHRISTMAS TREE FARM – THE ALPAUGH FAMILY

By: Tim Dunne



Tim Dunne

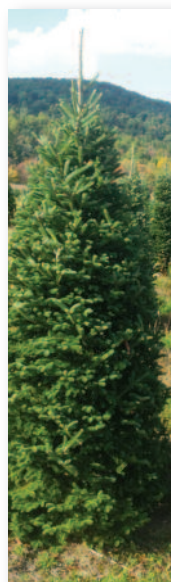
Evergreen Valley Christmas Tree Farm in Washington Township, Warren County is truly a family affair. Les Alpaugh and his son Andy bought the picturesque 145 acre farm in 2003 and quickly began to plant Christmas trees. Today about 40 acres of the farm is devoted to a wide diversity of Christmas trees. The Alpaughs are not newcomers to Christmas tree farming as Les had a small choose & cut operation at his home in Hunterdon County for more than 40 years. He also was a partner in another Christmas tree farm in the Englishtown area in the late 1970's. Evergreen Valley also has a significant "B&B" operation. The farm equipment includes a tree spade, tree tying machine, front end loader, backhoe and more to help facilitate digging and selling of dug trees.



Next crop of fir trees with colorful wooded hills in the background

The headwaters of the Pohatcong Creek flow through the farm in several different tributaries. The surface waters on the farm are protected by grass or newly planted tree buffers, and the water quality of the stream really shows it. Sparkling clear

waters flow under the farm lane bridge as you enter the farm. Other cropland acreage on Evergreen Valley Farm is leased out to a local grain farmer who plants and harvests an annual corn crop.



During the busy Christmas season on weekends you can find Les's wife Pat, Andy's wife Sara, and Andy's children Sam and Kate all lending a helping hand in the busy operation. Sara's father also helps out on weekends keeping the parking area organized and traffic flowing smoothly.

The tree species on the farm include Douglas fir, Fraser fir, Canaan fir, concolor fir, white pine, Scotch pine, Norway spruce and Colorado blue spruce. Other items sold at the farm during December include wreaths, tree stands and ornaments. A food truck is present on weekends during December to supply patrons with snacks, breakfast or lunch.

Les was a member of the NJ Christmas Tree Growers Association from the earliest days of the Association. Andy became a NJCTGA member in

A nice Evergreen Valley fir tree ready for harvest

2003, when they began planting at Evergreen Valley Farm. He was also recruited to be a Director and eventually became the Association's Executive Secretary, a position he held for 8 years. He is currently a Director on the NJCTGA Board. Both Les and Andy commented on benefits of the Association to growers. "The annual Choose & Cut Guide the NJCTGA prints and provides on line is a great benefit to NJ growers," said Andy. He also enjoys the informative meetings held several times each year with interesting topics and speakers. Les enjoys the "Esprit De Corps" at meetings when growers gather and compare notes, share tips and help each other understand the art and science of growing a Christmas tree.

Les and Andy had a few tips for new growers. Les suggested that before planting a new Christmas tree crop be sure to

choose a site with the proper conditions. Good soils with good drainage and natural soil fertility are a must. He has seen many folks plant trees and then learn later that the site was poor and the crop failed. Get a soils map and talk to the professionals before you plant trees. Les also believes in planting a diversity of tree species. "In nature diversity is a good thing and it holds true on a farm," Les explained. Andy added "don't over think". "Learn what you

need to know and move forward with the proper growing techniques. You do not need to analyze everything in detail and spray every insect you see."



Field of large Canaan fir sheared and ready for this season



Attractive sign welcoming customers to the picturesque farm



Third generation Christmas tree farmer Sam Alpaugh shears a Douglas fir

# News from National Christmas Tree Association

By: John C. Wyckoff, NJ Representative to National Christmas Tree Association



John Wyckoff

Greetings from Belvidere where we are finishing up pruning the trees we plan to harvest this season. The remaining trees will be pruned after sales season, as weather permits.

As I contemplated topics for this edition of the newsletter, I felt compelled to focus on consumer safety after reading the September Issue of The American Christmas Tree Journal published by The National Christmas Tree Association. In the issue is an update on the tragic Annapolis fire that occurred last Christmas season. For those not familiar with this incident, six family members, including four small children passed away in a home fire that involved a real Christmas tree. The circumstances surrounding the fire have been investigated as an arson by ATF. While I am not trying to minimize the fact that a Christmas tree was involved, I believe there are numerous indicators that prove this tragedy could have easily been avoided. As producers of real trees, we have an obligation to educate our customers about proper tree care. Our responsibility does not end with the sale, it begins. I urge everyone to develop a system of educating the customer about proper tree care. Here at our farm, we give each customer a "Tree Care Card" which is in the form of a rack card outlining proper tree care. Additionally, we have placed "Tree Care" on our website.

In closing, please be advised that the National Fire Code will be up for revision in 2016. This in turn impacts each state. I am positive that there will be recommendations for updates based on this tragedy. NCTA is proactive in representing our position and concerns as they pertain to Fire Code(s) and proposed amendments. NCTA is the only national association that will do so. At NCTA, there is a volunteer committee that focuses specifically on this subject.

If you are not a member of NCTA I urge you to investigate the new membership format and support the only national association that represents our industry!

## *The following is a reprint of the September NCTA article:*

Update on Annapolis Fire Story – After the story was first told of the tragic fire (see NCTA's Work on Fire-Related News Stories email sent April 14, 2015), Mr. Frank Gouin - professor emeritus of horticulture at the University of Maryland and Christmas tree farmer in Maryland - was quoted in the local newspaper stating that the fire was really bad because the tree was a Fraser fir. "The Fraser fir generates a tremendous amount of pitch and pitch are hydrocarbons - they burn like crazy," Gouin said. (The full article can be found at [www.capitalgazette.com/news/ph-ac-cn-fraser-fir-0208-20150208-story.html](http://www.capitalgazette.com/news/ph-ac-cn-fraser-fir-0208-20150208-story.html)) In response, NCTA staff coordinated with volunteer members of the Scientific Research Committee on a letter to the editor. The letter stated that the consensus of the research community was the species of the tree did not make any difference, and that sap content is far less important to the combustibility of conifer foliage than moisture content (read the full letter at [www.capitalgazette.com/opinion/columns/ph-ac-ce-guest-column-20150218-story.html](http://www.capitalgazette.com/opinion/columns/ph-ac-ce-guest-column-20150218-story.html)). Mr. Gouin responded to that, once again being published in the local paper. As part of the arson investigation of the mansion fire, ATF tried to replicate how the tree in the mansion fire was handled from the time of harvest until the fire occurred. ATF obtained three large 15-foot tall trees from the same source as the original tree, then tried to replicate the conditions of how the original tree was stored and handled prior to set up in the house. Apparently, the original tree was supplied and set up by a commercial company, not the home owner. ATF recovered enough of the original tree stand to be able to use the same type of stand to display the three trees that were used in the burn test. One tree was continually watered during the display period, one tree was displayed dry, and one tree was watered on a schedule that was based on the information that was obtained during the investigation of the fire. Dr. Gary Chastagner, member of the NCTA Scientific Research Committee and plant pathologist at Washington State University, spoke to Special Agent Dave Cheplak, ATF spokesman out of the Baltimore office. He reported, "Based on Mr. Cheplak's comments, I would say that the test conducted by the ATF is going to be an affirmation of the long-standing message that the Christmas tree industry has put out relating to the effectiveness of proper tree care in minimizing fire risks associated with the use of fresh cut trees, even if the trees are exceptionally large. It's hard to imagine that the Christmas tree industry could have asked for a better outcome." NCTA has reviewed the full report from the ATF investigation and also monitored some of the media coverage of the report being published. Of particular interest, on page 23, "It was approximated that the trees were watered once per week." *Yikes!*

**NCTA Members: To obtain a PDF version of the final report, including the ATF's conclusion, contact Rick at the NCTA office by calling (636) 449-5071 or email [dungey@realchristmastrees.org](mailto:dungey@realchristmastrees.org).** The ATF investigator's report is obviously the same message we have been trying to communicate to consumers for many years. And while that seems like good news, NCTA will need to keep an eye on and work fast and furious at times to prevent - or at least minimize - potential damage to our industry resulting from this tragic incident. The biggest fear among the volunteers who work on fire safety issues is that insurance underwriters will begin writing into homeowners' policies something pertaining to displaying a fresh Christmas tree. We'll keep everyone updated.



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# Summer Meeting Highlights

The annual Summer Meeting was held on Saturday, August 29 at Wyckoff's Christmas Tree Farm in Belvidere. John Wyckoff explained the farm history and discussed his experiences growing Christmas trees. Tracey Harpster from Penn State University discussed weed control in Christmas tree plantations and identified weeds that are common problems. Several of the trade show vendors demonstrated their equipment and had products for sale at the meeting. Thank you to the Wyckoff family for hosting a great meeting!



Members enjoyed the tour of Wyckoff's farm in tractor pulled wagons.



Above left – Members gather for a light breakfast and coffee before the start of the summer meeting.



Above right – Tracey Harpster from Penn State University and John Wyckoff discussed weed identification and weed control strategies.

## Welcome New Members!

**John and Kathy Nelson**  
LaBurnel Farm  
Oxford, Warren

**Chris Geckeler**  
Chris' Trees  
Princeton, Mercer

**James Friedrich**  
Friedrich Farm  
Cream Ridge, Ocean

### NJCTGA Officers

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If possible, ads should be submitted in PDF format, in 4-color process.

Contact Executive Secretary Donna Cole for additional details.





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